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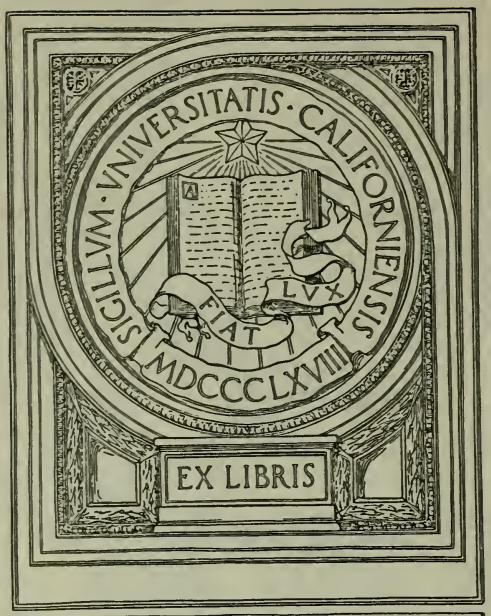
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BY BRIGGS DAVENPORT

With an Introduction by

JOSEPH REINACH

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BRIGGS DAVENPORT

AUTHOR OF "THE GENESIS OF THE GREAT WAR"

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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AUTHOR OF "LES COMMENTAIRES DE POLYBE" AND "LA GUERRE SUR LE FRONT OCCIDENTAL"

T. FISHER UNWIN, LTD.

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PREFACE

THE author of this pamphlet cherishes the desire to be accounted a just historian. Of this he has tried to give evidence in his more important work on the Great War: "The Genesis." But he holds that no really sincere historian has ever been able, if indeed he ever sought, to conceal his intimate conviction as to the moral and political responsibilities for the events with which he deals.

In reference to the present conflict, this truth is singularly obvious. The author has paid this tribute to the British nation and all its associate peoples with entire sincerity and with the simple object of helping to make clear to the nations of the world, belligerent or neutral, the real magnitude and unexampled significance of the noble and magnificent British effort.

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INTRODUCTION

THE creative military work and the work of military organisation accomplished by the British nation since the commencement of the war, and which have only now begun to find their recompense in actual events, can be compared to none other ever attempted.

When Dubois-Crancé and Carnot formed the armies of the Revolution, and Gambetta those of the National Defence, they had at their disposal not only a part of the body of officers who had survived the dissolution of the *Ancien Régime*, or the collapse of the Second Empire, but also and above all the primary material—than which none better existed in the world—a tried race of soldiers, native to a country that had been ever military and often enough bellicose.

On the contrary, as Britain, even much earlier than Shakespeare's time, gloried in being a fortress reared by Nature and herself "against the infection and the hand of war," so, from generation to generation, the military spirit became more and

more foreign to her, until she at length had held the profession of arms in so little esteem that it was reserved only for mercenaries, euphemistically styled "volunteers."

She had, indeed, at all times fine chiefs and fine soldiers, in the full and noble sense of the word—but how many?

An island, and mistress of the seas, she had no national army because she did not need one.

In countries which have been longest military in character, is it not the border provinces that have been most military? Not by reason of difference of race, but because, of all portions of the domain these, most open to invasion, oftenest menaced by the enemy, and destined to receive the first shock of his assault, are obliged to hold themselves in constant readiness for armed resistance.

Morally considered, the military spirit of Lorraine and Flanders is quite analogous to the natural means of defence of certain organic species which, had they not instinctively provided themselves with those means, would in a little while have perished.

That war could be a national industry was an idea most astonishing to the British, an astonishment not devoid of contempt, begotten perhaps of a conscious superiority in civilisation.

They had the sea. Of what use an army?

* * * * *

Suddenly Britain had need of one. And for the noblest of reasons, which makes of this the finest page of her history amongst others, glorious without doubt, but not wholly exempt from that mixture of potent qualities and not less potent faults which together have been designated as "British selfishness."

Britain did not throw herself, body and soul, into the war for the sake of Belgium alone: it was because, had she resigned herself to the violation of the neutrality of that small country, it would have been the end of the independence of all the little nations and the abasement of the whole world, before the revived brutality of the primitive ages.

I passed some time, on the very eve of the war (June, 1914), in England. I even visited the pleasant camp of Aldershot. How remote England then was from any sort of war, even from the lightest military effort! That state of mind, from which I retain a retrospective impression of anxiety, was even one of the causes of the catastrophe, because of the certitude the German Emperor derived from it that all things were permitted him.

Britain, however, could not have continued to live in her own esteem, had she allowed her signature at the bottom of the treaty to be protested.

All the German inventions, all the Imperial calumnies, cannot alter the materiality of facts.

Would you say that Britain, at the moment of declaring war on Germany, had no very approximate idea of what that war would be ?

Who, then, foresaw what it would be ? And who was more deceived than Germany herself ?

Even had she read the whole future as in an open book, Britain would not have hesitated longer.

The future for her was the need of following backward the current of her habitudes, her most ancient traditions, prejudices which until then had seemed to her as truths, almost, indeed, as the bases of her Empire : the need to be different, so that she might still be faithful, unto herself.

She hesitated ; how should she have determined instantly upon a revolutionary departure ?

She was slow in putting herself in motion ; she had never been swift in this respect. All the same she came to a resolve.

One may decline to do things ; if one does them, they must be well done.

To-day she has obligatory service, an army of several millions of men ; more officers than she had

of soldiers two years ago; as many cannon as the opposing lines, if not more, and an organisation of war-industries that is unsurpassed.

If that is not the accomplishment of a very great thing, then I will own that all my forty years of historical observation have been vain.

* * * * *

But has Britain, even in the course of her metamorphosis, been just to herself? We have been more so. Two weighty testimonies[1] have just come to her; the honourable jealousy of those Americans who are inconsolable not to have done what she has done; and the surprise of the Germans.

At length the Germans, being, as in most things, exactly informed, were convinced that there was a British Army and that it would come out of its trenches. But as spies cannot be expected to deal in their reports with "the soul of things," because the comprehension of it always eludes them, so it happened that Colonel Moraht was of the opinion that "the great strategic offensive of the British" would "be the end of their army on the Continent!"[2]

Indeed, the German Government comprehended

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[1] Notably this present pamphlet, for which my friend, Mr. Briggs Davenport, has asked me to write an Introduction.

[2] *Berliner Tageblatt.*

nothing of what at the present hour must seem most terribly clear to it.

In the first place, in the early days of the German onslaught against Verdun, the British high command put itself quite openly at the disposition of our own. Joffre, with his ordinary foresight, desired Sir Douglas Haig for the time being to limit his active aid to the extension of his front to the Somme; an operation easy enough on the map; in the execution, one of the most delicate. It was carried out to perfection. The British progressively took the place of our own divisions, so that the latter could swell the forces in Lorraine that were stemming the German advance.

The British would have preferred, no doubt, to open fire at once. They were envious of the glory of Verdun. What! merely to stand guard in trenches while the tremendous battle went on!

In the order of the virtues, I would readily put patience before courage. Joffre saw the German trap. A premature offensive, even if successful at some points, would not have relieved Verdun. Time must be allowed to the Germans before that position to wear themselves out; to the Russians to make ready the diversion that should compel the Germans to strengthen themselves in the East at the expense of their lines in the West; to ourselves,

whom the Germans believed to be exhausted, to constitute the group of armies which was to support the British offensive; and, finally, to the British not to be only half-prepared.

JOSEPH REINACH.

Paris, *July 5th*, 1916.

THE BRITISH EFFORT

I

HOW IT MUST BE JUDGED

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I

HOW IT MUST BE JUDGED

POPULAR vision of war is usually erroneous. The mass of mankind will always be most impressed by agencies that are noisiest or most conspicuous. The British share in the present world-struggle has been comparatively silent and comparatively invisible. But in that very silence and in that comparative invisibility, it has been all the more terrible, as viewed by any who have really understood it.

The modesty of British representative writers, characteristic as it is, and grounded in that noble pride that is due to a national consciousness of true worth, has delayed the adequate exposition of what the effort of their people and Government in the great war really has been. It has, indeed, been better set forth by foreign than by British writers. Britons have waited for recognition from others: have been rather indifferent to recognition, in fact, bending their thoughts rather upon the thing to be accomplished, the laying of that monstrous menace of the twentieth century, the menace of thraldom

to Teutonic militarism and Teutonic economic domination.

When the future authoritative historian writes his final commentary upon the relative forces engaged in stemming the German assault, he will declare that the British participation in the defence at least doubled the chance of its success.

Germany was surprised and enraged by Britain's prompt entry into the struggle, because she rightly measured its tremendous import. What it appeared to foreshadow has never been belied by events.

An Example for all Time

It is not necessary to dwell at any great length upon Britain's effort on land, remarkable and unprecedented in kind as it has been. The magnitude and the marvel of her preparation, tardy though it was, must strike every living mind with an awe transcendent of mere admiration. When, as an American onlooker, I wrote of it some months ago in "The Genesis of the Great War," I was less deeply impressed with it than I now am. The wonder of it will grow and still grow in men's minds as the years roll by. It will be for all time one of the most potent examples set as an imperishable gem in the world's memory. What I then said seems to me now most tamely prosaic :

"Britain, denounced so often since Napoleon's time as a 'nation of shopkeepers,' became suddenly an incensed people, breathing war and righteous retribution. Instead of a land force of less than 150,000 men, which was all, aside from her fleets, which she was at first expected to send to the aid of the French and Belgians, she actually in the course of nine months poured into the plains and marches and hill-ranges of Picardy, the Artois, and Flanders more than a million volunteers and regular soldiers, who proved themselves among the bravest who had ever flung themselves into a great struggle beyond the limits of the realm. Of this number a large proportion were from the overseas colonies and dominions, notably from India, Canada and Australasia. This manifestation of unity in patriotic feeling with the Motherland was as splendid as it was spontaneous. Men of all classes, from the highest to the humblest, gave superb evidence that they regarded resistance to the madly aggressive projects of Germany as not only a duty to themselves, in view of the jeopardy in which the national future was placed, but as a greater and more sacred duty to mankind. The Kaiser's Government had counted on quite a different order of things. . . . It had hoped for coldness towards the Motherland in the time of need on the part of Australia and Canada; for civil war in Ireland, and for revolt in Egypt, India and South Africa. . . . Where the British Empire had been supposed to be most vulnerable was India; but there the indigenous princes and peoples surpassed everything that could have been looked for in fervent loyalty and generous offers of troops, money and equipments. No higher tribute was ever paid to the efficiency of Anglo-Saxon rule and Anglo-Saxon civilising methods in remote lands. By the other Imperial dominions also warships, large bodies of soldiers, armed and equipped, and enormous quantities of war provisions were immediately tendered."

The Miracle of an Army

It would have been the height of absurdity to accuse the British nation at that stage of lukewarm-

ness towards the anti-Teutonic cause. Yet how vastly greater has been the manifestation of its purpose, its fortitude, and its power since then! Unpreparedness for war had in truth been a scandal; but never in the annals of the world had so gigantic a task as that of making up for this unpreparedness been performed with so much alacrity, with such magnificent individual and voluntary devotion. Was ever any so-called miracle of all those that men have spoken or written of more astounding than the raising of an army of five millions of men by sheer moral appeal, without real coercion of any kind, to fight an enemy in an outlying land? More than six million men had offered themselves. And the wonder of equipment and munitioning is like unto it. Thousands of munition factories where formerly perhaps there were some dozens! And Britain a country which in its very soul detests militarism and is perpetually enamoured of the arts of peace!

The facts which show forth against the relief of this moral background are, it seems to me, sufficiently eloquent by themselves. That nation, which abominating war, goes to war so magnificently, simply because the cause in its absolute justice is all-compelling, is surely doubly heroic—heroic both in the moral and in the physical sense. As a whole,

to prove its force of will, it had no need of conscription, seeing that it had raised the mightiest volunteer host ever known. Conscription after all is universal in form only. In reality it is a measure for the ill-willed, the cowardly and the laggards. And what a small proportion they are of the virile strength of Britain!

A Colossal Human Engine

What fighting the British troops have done in Belgium and France is a part of that glorious record of the war which nothing can dim. But the potential value of the army of five millions is greater even than the past deeds of those divisions of it which have been in the direst hell of battle. They are ready, watchful of opportunity, a colossal human engine, compact of energy.

Foreign writers, as I have said, and particularly French writers, have paid high tribute to Britain's preparation after the first alarm of war. André Chevrillon's book, "L'Angleterre et la Guerre" (Hachette), is by far the best study of the subject that has appeared. He analyses minutely the state of the English public mind in various stages of its progressive warlike evolution, since the sovereign rights of the Belgian nation were violated, and duly

weighs all the factors that made for or against the calling out of all of Britain's manhood strength.

The contrast between the military situation in England before the war and what it was a few months later appears more incredible, if a seeming paradox may be used, to those who have actually witnessed it near at hand than to those who have vaguely viewed it from a distance. This is because the reality so exceeds all previous phenomena in history, and also because at the beginning of August, 1914, it was so intrinsically improbable. "The tradition of immediate contact with the horrors and the heroism of war," as I have elsewhere written, "had largely been lost in the British Isles. Since the attempt upon the throne by the ill-starred Duke of Monmouth, which culminated so pitiably at Sedgemoor in 1685, there had been no battle worthy of the name on English soil."

Break with Sacred Traditions

Now it was that events summoned the British nation most brusquely to break with certain traditions which might justly be regarded as sacred. "As at all the critical moments of her past," writes M. Chevrillon, "England learned the lesson of things. . . . In eight months, England, who before

could not count her three hundred thousand soldiers, had two millions on foot."

He notes the process of adaptation which " worked veritable organic changes " in the body politic. This process received its first recognised impetus from *The Times*, which gave, as he says, " the tocsin stroke that was echoed by all the great journals." The series of agitations that followed culminated in the conscience of the nation being fully awakened. It is difficult to gauge with words the intense and profound moral effort with which the British gave birth to the superb material effort that has astounded the world. What most practically concerns us is the latter, although it is both together that have affrighted Germany more than aught else in this war. While she is nearing the very finish of her powers, she sees the ready strength of the British people continuously augmented, on sea as well as on land. The very silence of this great phenomenon, remarks M. Chevrillon, is what makes it most disquieting to Germany. It is in ominous contrast to all the tumultuous manifestations of the latter's hate.

II
BEHIND THE LINES

II

BEHIND THE LINES

MANKIND has lost the relative measure of war and of warlike preparation. This is simply because the conditions of war to-day are such as never before existed in the history of the world. A new standard is in course of creation, whereby this and future wars are to be judged.

We are concerned here with the part that Britain and her Colonies and Dominions are playing in this creation. It is, in short, a question of relative valuation, most difficult of all problems when the determining factors are new and the co-ordination of the details of the essential facts is as yet incomplete.

We may be said to have arrived at the climax—or very near it—of the modern evolution of war. The perfecting of war machinery and of chemically prepared war material has necessarily changed both field tactics and the very methods of fighting; and it has multiplied the cost of it many times over.

In former ages nations were said to have been

exhausted by war; but the destruction of lives and of wealth which then meant exhaustion was as nothing to what it is to-day. The greatest damage that was then inflicted by belligerent nations upon one another was chiefly confined to the immediate effects of the operations of the armies in the field. Even there (if we leave aside the fabulous exaggerations of some of the old historians) the loss of life and the devastation of property were proportionately far less than at present.

Demands upon Resources

But a comparison of the effects of war upon the non-combatants, upon the millions of people in the belligerent countries who are far removed from the sounds of battle, in that time and in this, presents a still greater difference. Never before were these nations in their mass subjected to such stupendous demands upon their resources. Terrific, under the new conditions of warfare, as is the brunt of battle, the actual burden of the maintenance of war, measured in terms of equipment and supplies, is even more stupendous.

The British Empire, being at the commencement the least prepared in the military sense of all the Powers which have engaged in the war, had for

many months proportionately fewer men in actual battle than her Allies; though at the present her field forces are second to none either in numbers or in armament. The proportion of numbers to population is greater even than that in any other country, France alone excepted. Consider the vast energy and expenditure that have been necessary for the production of those forces in so short a time—five million men where before less than a quarter of a million were ready for service. Consider the lack of training, the lack of officers, the lack of equipment, the lack of guns!

And this is but a single phase of the material effort behind the fighting lines. War changes for the time the very economic functioning of society, and in an immensely greater degree than formerly. In Britain the readjustments of the organism were less readily accomplished than on the Continent. Britain was morally more remote from war than any other nation in this hemisphere, the neutral State of Switzerland possibly excepted. And Britain's moral and physical impulses must ever be in accord before she acts. Regarded at the true angle of vision, her industrial transformation is one of the wonders of all time. Yesterday an agglomeration of peaceful, closely-knit manufacturing communities; to-day a vast arsenal, clanging with the

unceasing haste of war-production! And in her ports her shipbuilding redoubled!

The Financial Aspect

An even more striking aspect of the material effort behind the lines is the financial one, because it is so easily expressed to the understanding of the ordinary man. The war is costing the United Kingdom far more than it is any other Power. Her expenditure of five million pounds a day is something that is plain enough as set down in figures, yet is beyond the power of the imagination actually to grasp in its literal, intrinsic meaning. And up to four months ago Britain had advanced £368,000,000 to her Allies and her outlying Dominions engaged in the war.

Unlike Germany and other of the belligerents, she is not financing the war upon credit alone, but is providing by increased taxation for the future payment of her loans and for the payment of the interest on them as it falls due. The revenue of her Government for the fiscal year of 1916–17 will exceed that of 1913–14 by £309,000,000. The extraordinary taxation for war expenses amounts to £170,000,000 per annum. Germany is nominally effacing part of her loan obligations with fresh loans and is paying the interest on both with further loans.

In Britain, the banknote circulation is more than covered by the gold reserve, while in Germany the note circulation is inflated to nearly three times the amount of the gold held by the Imperial Bank. Measured by the discount rates, the British banknote commands seven times greater confidence abroad than does the German.

Capacity for Endurance

In a war like the present one, the value of any nation's effort is largely dependent upon the capacity for endurance which it develops. With more speed in preparation, Britain would very possibly have developed less thoroughness, and therefore less competency, for the ordeal before her. M. Clemenceau recognised this fact when he wrote that "no nation had prepared herself with more method, with more energy, to fulfil her task to the end." In military parlance, the expense of the preparation of each "unit" in her Continental army has been double that of the like unit in the armies of her Allies.

In a long war, endurance in the last analysis, other things being equal, is the all-important factor. The events of every day on the Franco-British battle front are proving this. When the decisive moment arrives, it may well be expected that the

traditional steadiness and cheerful resolution of the British yeomanry and gentry will once more make for victory. It is not at all unlikely that they will be the determining element.

British common-sense views the heavy cost of proper equipment for the national troops as the soundest prudence. British common-sense looks upon any money cost as none too heavy if it but free the world of the greatest peril by which it has ever been menaced. Britain has mobilised her wealth for the winning of the war with the firm will to lose her wealth if need be rather than her freedom.

The Price of Safety

It must not be forgotten, too, that her lines of defence (potentially at least) are not limited to the trenches that she occupies on the Continent and the sea routes which she ceaselessly guards. They are really commensurate with the vastness of her Empire. And every mile of all her Imperial frontiers is in a certain degree vital to the integrity of the common resistance of the Allies. For, if the unity of the British Empire at any one point were to be permanently broken the main issue of the resistence to the Germanic Empires would be fatally jeopardised. The British Empire must be kept intact or the liberty of Europe falls; and eternal

vigilance, with all that it implies, is the sole price of safety. Thus, in preserving her own unity and territorial integrity, even aside from her tremendous effort in France, she is rendering an inestimable service to her Allies and to the world.

III
ON THE HIGH SEAS

III

ON THE HIGH SEAS

It might seem superfluous to dwell upon the work and influence in this war of the British Navy, so soon after the great battle off the Jutland coast, which emphasised so strongly once more its retention of all its historic qualities, while the boasted German sea-prowess is still, on the other hand, more theoretical even than potential.

This event, however, illustrated inversely and by contrast the fact that a navy's most effective influence may very well lie in its comparatively unseen and almost wholly silent activities. The Jutland fight was a tremendous outbreaking of force, an explosion, so to speak, of long treasured energy, with terrifically tragic and destructive results. But, after all, its effect was simply confirmatory of a condition previously existent—the British dominance and the German inadequacy at sea. If the whole of the German Grand Fleet had been annihilated the victory of the British could not have been clearer. The Grand Fleet was beaten in a

battle fought, for the most part, under circumstances wholly favourable to itself, and it proved that it was beaten, first, by its evident losses (greatly swollen by subsequent revelations), and second, by its flight.

Culmination of Patient Strategy

The Jutland encounter may be regarded as the culmination of nearly two years of careful and patient naval strategy on the part of the British. From the very commencement of the war a great part of the task of the British Navy was to worry the German Grand Fleet into emergence from its lair, the Kiel Canal. In the mere fact of its coming out there was a preliminary victory of the British policy, and an indisputable testimony to the British naval power, in so much as this long-foreseen event was the direct result of the steady tightening of the sea-cordon which had been slowly, but with certainty, squeezing the economic life out of Germany.

It is much to be doubted that the directors of the German Navy sent the Grand Fleet forth, as has been pretended, with glad and confident hearts. If they were really eager that it should try conclusions with the British, it is quite logical to suppose that it would have done so much earlier, before, indeed, a way had been found to circumscribe

effectively the German submarine activity. A study of the naval story of the war down to the time of the Jutland battle can hardly lead to any other candid opinion in this regard than that the sallying forth of the Kaiser's big ships from the lazy shelter of the Kiel Canal was precisely like that of a besieged garrison when long confinement has begun to enervate it, and it is constantly visited by visions of an approaching ignominious end.

More an Adventure than an Enterprise

The outlook for Germany's land operations was growing blacker and blacker, and the dismal consciousness that the war of aggression was already a failure was gradually taking possession even of the dull intellects of the masses. It was for the Grand Fleet to kindle a revival of hope and confidence. The value of its effort must be estimated from this point of view. The sally was more an adventure than it was a well-considered enterprise. Its utter failure is obvious. Although the battle on the German side was well and (up to a certain point) bravely fought, it lacked the element of lion-like boldness that has always distinguished the Anglo-Saxon breed of fighting seamen. The retreat, as soon as it appeared that the opposing forces might be equalised, was disgraceful. If any British fleet had

been guilty of such an act of pusillanimity it would have been everlastingly covered with national detestation. For smaller shortcomings than that English naval chiefs have suffered condign punishment.

Britain began, immediately upon her declaration of war, that constant, untiring strategic effort at sea which led to this glorious climax. As the months passed Germany's naval paralysis became more and more intense, relieved only by a few sporadic revivals of energy. There was never for a single instant any relaxation of Britain's strangle-grip upon Germany's marine resources. Grimly Britain watched and followed her every naval move. Grimly and undeviatingly Britain sought battle with German fighting ships wherever and whenever they could be met.

How the British Navy Talks

The first great sea-fight of the war, that of the Heligoland Bight, as well as the one on the Dogger Bank and those in South American waters, bespoke the same inflexible resolution which had made a St. Vincent and a Nelson court the chance of defeat under almost all circumstances rather than to run the other risk of not finding the enemy again. The British Navy talks only with its guns. The German Navy has been always talking since Wilhelm II.—

the Imperial Falstaff—began its development and uttered that futile and foolish prophecy: "Our Empire is the sea!" The German Navy has boasted while hiding, since August 1914, in its land-locked havens, of the great things that it would do when once it should quit them. But in all that time the British Navy, with hardly a spoken word to the world at large, was incessantly, indefatigably at work. Stupendous as were the blows given and taken off the coast of Jutland; great as are and will be the results of that encounter, they are but little in comparison to what the British Navy had already accomplished in the war, without unneedful noise, without factitious *éclat*.

Germany took more than forty years to raise her land armament, already excessive at the close of the Franco-Prussian war, to its present unprecedented proportions. For twenty-three months it has withstood, on fronts measuring many hundreds of miles, the hammering of the armies of three of the other Great Powers, not to mention their minor Allies. In approximately twenty years Germany created a navy second to only one other, while at the same time she built up a merchant marine more rapidly, with more abundant profit, than any nation had ever done. It is virtually Britain alone who has assailed her naval power

directly. After twenty-three months of war, Germany's armies, in spite of losses which no adjective can adequately characterise, are still intact and still formidable. But what of her navy and her merchant marine? The former crippled and paralysed; the latter swept from the seas! German foreign commerce no longer existent; Germany effectively blockaded; even neutral maritime countries restrained from trading with her. What of her island colonies? All, without any exception, taken from her. Meanwhile the seas are kept open for all the non-German allies, and they are freely supplied with goods and munitions from abroad; and no naval attacks except those of a secret and piratical nature can be effective against them. And who has done all this? Britain!

How Different it Might Have Been

The energy required for such achievements is not to be expressed by the same notation as the energy which is productive of military results on land. Yet by the true relative valuation it is as great. Without Britain's naval co-operation, it is not too much to say that the defensive task on the Continent of Europe would have been at least thrice as difficult. For instance, in the first stage of the war, but for the British naval guard, Germany could surely have

mastered the French ports on the Channel; and it is unlikely, once these were in her hands, and her navy in unrestrained activity, that she could ever have been compelled to relinquish them. But for Britain's naval power, all the neutral maritime countries would now be freely and openly administering to Germany's military and civil needs. The French Navy could not alone have coped with the German Navy. Italy, even if British inactivity had not prevented her from turning against her former allies, which is highly improbable, could not have spared her ships from the task of keeping an unremitting watch upon those of Austria-Hungary. It is conceivable even that the French Fleet might have been bottled up in the Mediterranean, as the German Fleet has been, in fact, for most of the time, in the Baltic.

I am sure, also, that a cold, mathematical calculation of the material and vital energy represented and expended by a great and ceaselessly active navy like that of Great Britain would make quite as brave a showing as the same test applied to a great army on terra firma. It should be remembered that the peril of a warship at sea is constant and unceasing, while that of a land force exists only in the presence of the enemy.

IV
ON MANY FRONTS

IV

ON MANY FRONTS

NUMBERS of fighting men and their training and the weight and quality of war equipment and munitions are not the only elements that count for military efficiency. We must add to these the spirit of the effort and its opportuneness.

The first months of the war were those that were most fraught with risk for France. France was the essential object of the initial German aggression. Such a contingency as the invasion of Belgium had often been contemplated by military authorities. It was much less a surprise than has been generally believed. But the momentary check at Liége was hardly expected. A much more thorough surprise than either was the speed of the German drive across the French border to the line of the Somme, accompanied by the prompt demolition of the northern fortresses. This at once put the political life of France and the cause of all the Allies in imminent jeopardy.

A Determining Factor

It was at this "very nick of time" that the "contemptible little British Army," so called by his Imperial Prussian Majesty, came straightway into strenuous action. Inconsiderable in numerical strength, when compared with the swarming hordes of the Kaiser, it was yet in a great degree a determining factor in that first campaign of the Allies. Whether its absence would have meant a different result is altogether a question for military savants. Certain it is that in the right time and place, which were the time and place of greatest stress and peril, it contributed essentially to the delaying of the German general advance. The celerity and skill with which it had been "whisked" over, as it were, without hitch or loss from England, under the sleepless guard of the Channel Fleet, is an obvious testimony to British executive efficiency; but it is a yet greater testimony to the value to the Allies, even at that early stage of the struggle, of British naval supremacy.

Both these facts were obscured to the popular apprehension by the subsequent quick series of brilliant achievements by the "contemptible little Army." There is nothing finer in history than its resistance to numbers immensely greater than its

own on the left flank of the French general line—to field artillery whose crushing force was then well demonstrated for the first time. Fighting against these cruel odds all the way from Condé, by Mons, Maubeuge, Le Cateau, Saint-Quentin, Soissons, Compiégne, and Meaux, to the Grand Morin, it stiffened the flank of the retreating mass and served largely as a rearguard where the need of fortitude and stability was greatest. Its service in the strategic retreat was indeed invaluable. So constantly had it fought that when the valley of the Marne was reached the German commander, Von Kluck, regarded it as virtually out of action. Its magnificent reappearance at the Ourcq, with Maunoury's newly organised force, must have inflicted upon the Germans a moral shock as well as a physical one.

Foretaste of British Military Quality

That first dramatic campaign gave a foretaste of what the quality of British military action throughout the war was to be. The superb spirit of sacrifice of Britain's soldiers is proved by the heavy percentages of their losses. There has been no species of severe ordeal incident to this war of which they have not had a share. And they have borne it all with the cheerful stoicism of men in whom is

ingrained a deeper love of duty and of self-respect than of life and well-being.

I cannot do more here than merely indicate very imperfectly what the tale of their achievements is, since the first tumultuous fortnight of August 1914. After the ever-glorious victories of the Ourcq and the Marne, and the counter-pursuit, came the long, violent, wearisome fighting on the line of the Aisne; the outflanking rivalry of the Allied and the German armies in their race to the sea, culminating in the warfare of the trenches; then, after the fall of Antwerp, long months of alternate siege and assault in the watery plain of Flanders; the furious battles of Ypres, the repeated struggles of the Germans, with immolation of great masses of men, to pierce a way to Calais and Boulogne; the ever-varying conflict around Arras and La Bassée; the ceaseless night-and-day "give and take" of forces now more nearly equalised, punctuated here and there by sanguinary battles which will give a glorious significance for all future generations to local names hitherto obscure, such as La Bassée, Armentières, Fromelles, Ramscappele, Neuve-Chapelle, Saint-Georges, Givenchy, St. Eloi, Loos, Van Hooge Château, and many others; and later the taking over from the French of much of the southern front, until the British line extends at the present moment

to several times its original length. The growth of this line is more or less proportionate to that of the British Army in France and Belgium. The fighting before Verdun can alone be said to exceed in any sense that which has taken place on this front, and it may well be that what is to come will be equally severe.

In all the operations against the Germans near the sea in Belgium the British Navy has co-operated most diligently and effectively. It has proved a constant torment to the enemy, and it has largely helped to frustrate some of his most carefully projected schemes. Further, its resistance to the submarine warfare of the Germans and the fearfully effective counter-measures which it has employed to that end have been in the literal sense marvellous. Not until after the war can any adequate conception be formed of the real value and magnitude of this phase of the British effort.

British Arms in many Climes

It has been said that British Armies in this war are fighting on seven fronts—or, otherwise expressed, in seven different areas or countries. The number is even greater, if all the campaigns against German colonial forces be taken into account. Soldiers and sailors have fought for the cause of the Allies at the

same time in various parts of Africa, in the Suez region, in Sinai, in Mesopotamia and in China, as well as in Belgium, France, Turkey-in-Europe, and Greece and Serbia, not to mention the greatest front of all, the illimitable high seas, facing innumerable coasts, hostile, neutral or Allied. The misfortunes attending the Mesopotamia and Gallipoli expeditions do not render them any the less creditable to the officers and rank and file who have served in them. British arms have everywhere been gloriously borne by men from all parts of the British dominions. In no previous war have so many races loyally served under the same flag. The Canadians, the Australasians, the Indians, and other Colonial troops have covered themselves with imperishable honour in Belgium, the North of France and Artois, in Asia and Africa. The patience and heroism of the small body of men who marched up the bitter wastes of old Chaldea, Babylonia, and Assyria, with the hope of capturing Baghdad will long live in the world's story. And the splendid conduct of the Australasians in the Gallipoli Peninsula is already legendary, and has given to the English tongue in the word "Anzac" a new and ringing synonym of gallantry and devotion.

From 75,000 to 5,000,000

The British Army that took part in the early campaign in Flanders and France in 1914 did not exceed 75,000 men. In less than three weeks from the landing of the first detachment Lord Kitchener could announce that he had 200,000 more men ready to debark on the Continent and that a million British soldiers were already under arms. That first giant stride in preparation, under the magical direction of the greatest of military organisers, was even more remarkable than the swelling of the number under arms, in the next year and a half, to the amazing total of five millions. It is one thing to enlist men and another to make soldiers of them at short notice.

What Britain's two years of rapid preparation is really to mean in the prosecution of the war as a whole is yet to be seen. Her armies have done great things; there is every sound reason to believe that what they will yet do when the supreme crisis arrives will be even greater. Both in her armies and in her fleets, as developed under the growing stress of war, she has fighting resources ready for action the like of which no single country has ever before possessed. This strength, under her pledge of honour, belongs as much to the Allies of Britain for the purposes of this war as it does to herself. It

is for their use and benefit as their own strength is for hers. What a sublime spectacle is this strict unity of purpose and of mighty endeavour in the most sacred of causes, on the part of four of the greatest races of the earth!

NOTE

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